



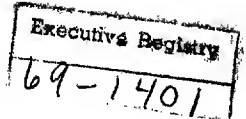
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

HEADQUARTERS

UNITED STATES ARMY

JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR SPECIAL WARFARE (AIRBORNE)
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA 28307



ATCSW-AID

11 March 1969

Mr. Richard Helms
Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dick:

If you have a free moment, I would greatly appreciate a word or two of advice on a plan I have been working on for the last couple of months.

During my ten years with AID and its predecessor agency, ICA, I have been appalled by the lack of information reaching the public concerning our foreign economic assistance programs - especially in the case of Vietnam, where we have expended over five billion dollars since 1955 on non-military projects.

For the past two years here at Ft. Bragg I have lectured to approximately 10,000 officers and senior NCO's on foreign aid, as well as to civilian institutions such as the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Everywhere, almost without exception, the same question is asked "Why did not someone tell us all this before?"

From my observations, a similar situation exists in Europe even to a greater degree anent to knowledge of our economic assistance programs. There, as in this country, when our overall efforts in Vietnam are publicized, it is a question of "bad news makes headlines, while good news is commonplace". We are best known for our 500,000 plus troops in that country, the B-52 raids, napalm, our K. I. A. figures, defoliation et cetera - all negative. A few lines about the new U. S. sponsored medical school in Cholon, for instance, might appear on page 60 of the New York Times under the Macy ad - if we are lucky.

Insofar as Vietnam is concerned, the eyes of the world are now focussed on Saigon, Hanoi, Washington and Paris. I think that it would be in this latter city that we might achieve the most mileage out of a low-key presentation of the lasting contributions which the U. S. has made in Vietnam, and thereby take the propaganda play away from Hanoi.

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There are hundreds of films et cetera on the new "miracle" IR-8 rice, our malaria control program, U. S. built schools and universities et cetera that might be used without fanfare in some sort of an exhibit - possibly sponsored by the Paris Herald Tribune or a firm such as IBM, rather than by USIA.

With a little subtlety, our peace negotiators could use this as a feeler for a post-war aid program to North Vietnam as well as South Vietnam, as President Johnson alluded to in his 1965 address at Johns Hopkins. This "Office of Peace Information", or whatever it might be called, would, I believe go along on its own momentum, without any press kits, briefings or the like.

Last December, on my way back from Vietnam via Paris, I was told by certain members of our negotiating team that what we lacked most of all was good public relations. This might help. It would almost certainly get attention from the various media covering the negotiations, as there is precious little to report on the peace talks these days. An extra dividend, which should have a salubrious effect on the credibility gap in this country, would be the carry-over to the U. S. press, where our economic assistance to Vietnam has received little, if any, coverage.

I have discussed this idea informally with Ambassador Bui Diem, Barry Zorthian and two or three of our top foreign correspondents and have received a good reaction from all concerned. However, as you well know, a project such as this will die on the vine unless some interest is stirred up in the proper quarters.

It is late in the day in Vietnam, but not too late. I would be most grateful for any thoughts you might have on the above. I know how busy you are and trust this is not an imposition on my part.

Kindest regards,

Sincerely,



Donald Q. Coster
AID Advisor

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